

Celebrating Success

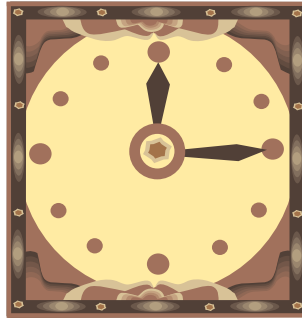
WAIT-TIME REDUCTION PROJECT Named 2003 National Association of Counties Best of Category for Human Services

Here at Catawba County Social Services, we aim to serve our customers in a prompt, effective and friendly manner. That's how the "15-minute rule" was created. Because our customers lead busy lives and come to us in a time of need, we aspire to limit waiting room visits to no longer than 15 minutes. This can be a challenge because the Agency greets a customer at its doors, on average, every minute and a half.

The economic downturn has led to a dramatic increase in customers visiting us for assistance during the past year, especially for the Food Stamps unit. The number of Food Stamp recipients has increased over 100% during this recession. Customers found themselves facing a full lobby when they entered the Food Stamp department. The wait could be well over an hour. With so many layoffs and business closings, families faced the financial difficulty of purchasing food for their families. Daily the Food Stamp waiting area became flooded with families needing assistance. Caseworkers who needed deskwork time to process applications, found themselves constantly pulled off deskwork to see applicants in order to reduce the long waiting time to file an application. To stick to the 15-minute rule, the Food Stamps unit decided to design an innovative way to do business while maintaining its high accuracy rating of 96.89%.

Management struggled to find an answer to the long wait time for applicants. After much discussion and brainstorming, the unit determined that the wait time was longest during the lunch hours from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Therefore, we determined that extra staff was needed to take applications during this time.

Food Stamp caseworkers willingly accepted the offer to try a new coverage procedure. To avoid the backlogs that invariably occurred when workers rotated out for lunch,



caseworkers agreed to reduce their lunch hour to 30 minutes. Because the Fair Labor Standards Act covers the workers, their workweek cannot exceed 40 hours without paid overtime. To avoid overtime pay, workers are given time off at the end of a workday sometime during the week. The change in scheduling caused the wait time for Food Stamp applicants to decrease to less than fifteen minutes. In fact, in June 2003, the Food Stamp wait time was 12 minutes. Customers are satisfied with the reduced wait time and caseworkers enjoy the opportunity to leave work early one afternoon each week.

This innovative approach to customer service received a 2003 National Association of Counties Achievement Award and was named the nation's best program in Human Services by the Association.

Thanks to creative team cooperation, both the customer and the employee benefited from this new approach to doing business. And Catawba County Social Services is pleased to successfully continue the 15-minute rule—No customer should wait more than 15 minutes for our assistance.

